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- ART. I.—1. *Robin Hood: a Collection of all the Ancient Poems, Songs, and Ballads now extant relative to that celebrated English Outlaw; to which are prefixed Historical Anecdotes of his Life.* Carefully reprinted from RITSON. 1840.
2. *The Robin Hood Garlands and Ballads, with the Tale of the Lytell Geste: a Collection of all the Poems, Songs, and Ballads relating to this celebrated Yeoman; to which is prefixed his History and Character, deduced from Documents hitherto unrevised.* Edited by JOHN MATTHEW GUTCH, F. S. A. In 2 vols. 1850.
3. MR. HUNTER'S *Critical and Historical Tracts.* No. IV. *The Ballad Hero, Robin Hood.* 1852.

ROBIN HOOD! all over England it is a name of affection, heroism, and gladness. It is so even where the ballads about him have been long forgotten, and where no recollection of his history survives. But how is this? His history quite forgotten, why should his name excite such feeling? It is because of the past; because of its having become a name of feeling. Just as *love* means *affection*, even with persons ignorant of the Saxon word of a thousand years ago, whence it is derived, so it is with the name of Robin Hood. Among the poor, at least, it has been repeated from father to son, with such deep

emotion that its import could be more truly divined from the tones in which it is pronounced, than from any information preserved by historians. A robber he has been called, and so has been dismissed from all consideration by writers, who yet have been enthusiastic for "William Walleys, that mayster was of thieves." An outlaw! as such he has been overlooked as unworthy of notice by historical writers, as though there could be no outlaw of any other character than a fugitive from some such warrant as might be issued against him in the name of her Majesty Queen Victoria, who might secrete himself in some cellar from a man called a constable, dressed in scarlet plush, with a three-cornered hat. A very different outlaw from this was Robin Hood, and one who put himself beyond the reach of very different laws from those administered under Queen Victoria, and who showed himself hostile to very different usages from any which exist now, either between castle and cottage or monarch and subject,—a man whom we can understand at all only by seeing him with his bow in his hand, and his enemies about him,—only by our seeing who the persons were whom he helped, and who the men were whom he might have been willing to shoot,—only by knowing what was aristocracy, and what was serfdom, what the Church was, and what the court was, and what was forest law under the first Edwards.

It is very singular how silent history has been on Robin Hood, considering how great a name, how wide a place, and how abiding a reputation he has had in England. History in England has not been of the people, or in the fourteenth century it would have been of Robin Hood. Indeed, it has not been of the people so much as it has been of geography and shifting boundaries, of royal families, their cruelties and imbecilities, and of old dates that have become almost void of meaning. Even Turner and Hallam have held Robin Hood beneath their mention. Yet really there was no man more important to their purpose; for to understand him was to understand the people of his day. During a long era, Robin Hood was, as it were, the English people,—was their hero,—a man who writhed with their sufferings, hated with their hatreds, and whose motives in strife were feelings like

their own, — a man who, by skill and power, did very nearly such things as they would all of them have wished to do.

The writer who seems first to have discerned any historical significance in the life of Robin Hood was Thierry, in his *History of the Norman Conquest*. In the volumes of Mr. Gutch are gathered together all the ballads on Robin Hood, together with a large amount of matter, pictorial and antiquarian, illustrative of the life and locality of the famous outlaw. In Mr. Hunter's *Critical and Historical Tract on the "Ballad Hero"* we have some very precise and singular information about him, published now for the first time; and, with this guidance, we are enabled to identify Robin Hood at the court of Edward II., and also at a manorial court held at Wakefield we can hear a name called which sounds like Robin's. This tract is worthy of the author's learning and sagacity, and of the opportunities which he enjoys for research among ancient documents.

Let us now examine some of the ballads for information as to Robin Hood. But if it should be thought that, on account of their poetical form, they must be worthless as history, then let it be understood that perhaps their character is altogether misconceived; for they may not at all have been intended as poetry, in our sense of the word. Anciently ballads were often literal narratives; and if rhymes and verses seem a strange form for history, then let it be considered that ballads were narratives designed for the use of those who could not read, — histories published among the ignorant in such a way as was possible. Nor yet did a man become a subject for ballads only after he was long dead. About a living man, ballads went among his contemporaries from mouth to mouth, and from county to county, in something like the manner of a weekly newspaper. No doubt, through the oral way in which they were published, these old ballads were liable to corruption; but also, for the same cause, they were easily capable of correction, and subject to it; and certainly for some of these poems on Robin Hood there may be claimed all that Selden meant when he said that there are ballads which are of better authority than many histories.

Of the Robin Hood poems the longest and the most important is "*The Lytell Geste in Eight Fyttes.*" The oldest copy

of it in existence is in black-letter, and was printed by Wynken de Worde, about the year 1520. It is in the language of the fourteenth century, and it sounds as though it might be an authentic account. In all probability, as a history of occurrences, it is worthy of entire trust, corroborated as it now is, after five hundred years, in the most important particulars, from the Royal Journals of the Chamber, the Fœdera, and other documents. The main part of the ballad concerns Robin Hood and a knight, who proves to be Sir Richard at the Lee in Lancashire. At the beginning of it, it is said that

“ Robyn was a proude outlawe,  
Whyles he walked on ground; ;  
So curteyse an outlawe as he was one  
Was never none y-founde.”

It is stated to be Robin Hood's custom never to dine without company. Also it is told, —

“ A good maner than had Robyn  
In londe where that he were,  
Every daye or he woulde dyne  
Thre messes wolde he here :

“ The one in the worshyp of the fader,  
The other of the holy goost,  
The thyrd was of our dere lady,  
That he lovéd of all other moste.

“ Robyn loved our dere lady ;  
For doute of dedely synne,  
Wolde he never do company harme  
That ony woman was ynne.”

Little John asks his master for directions for their conduct.

“ Ther of no fors, sayd Robyn,  
We shall do well ynough ;  
But loke ye do no housbonde harme  
That tylleth with his plough ;

“ No more ye shall no good yeman,  
That walketh by grene wode shawe,  
Ne no knyght, ne no squyer,  
That wolde be a good felawe.

“ These bysshoppes, and these archebysshoppes,  
Ye shall them bete and bynde ;  
The hye sheryfe of Notynghame,  
Hym holde in your mynde.”

So Little John, Much the miller's son, and William Scathe-lock, go out to look for a guest for Robin. At last, in a gloomy spot, near the old Watling Street, they meet a knight of no proud look, with his hood hanging over his eyes, and riding with one foot in the stirrup and with the other waving loose. Little John kneels to him, and invites him into the woods, to dine with his master. When he is brought to Robin Hood, they wash and wipe themselves, and sit till dinner; when they have plenty of bread and wine, and deer's umbles, swans, pheasants, and every little bird of the brier. After he has dined, the knight remarks that he has not had such a dinner for three weeks; and he promises that, if ever he should come into that neighborhood again, he will return his host's kindness. “Grammercy,” says Robin, “when I have had one dinner, I was never so greedy as to be already craving another. But pay for your dinner now before you go. Pay for you I cannot, because I am only a yeoman, and you are a knight.” The knight answers, that he has nothing which he can offer for shame, and that indeed he has only ten shillings in his coffer. Little John spreads his mantle on the ground, and finds in his coffer only half a pound. Then Robin remarks about the knight, that his clothes are very thin, and he asks him to drink more wine and tell his history. The knight explains, that he has been at great expense on account of his son, who has had the misfortune to slay a knight of Lancashire and his squire; that he has therefore been obliged to mortgage his lands to the Abbot of St. Mary's at York; and that the next day he must lose his estate unless he can pay to the abbot four hundred pounds. Here the knight sheds tears, and turns to go away. Little John, Scathelock, and Much the miller's son, weep along with him for pity. But Robin orders them to fill with the best wine, and swears

“ By hym that me made,  
And shope both sonne and mone.”

Then the knight has a loan made to him of four hundred pounds, by his host; and also has given to him cloth of every color, and a horse to carry his presents, likewise a pair of boots. Little John adds a pair of gilt spurs, and accompanies the knight on his journey. Thus ends the first fyte. In the second fyte, the abbot tells his convent that twelve months ago he made a loan to a knight of four hundred pounds on his land; and that now he expects to have the land forfeited to him. And he seems to have provided himself with legal means for hastening and securing the forfeiture. The prior hopes the abbot will not exact it, and be so light of conscience. The abbot answers the prior, that he is always in his beard. A fat-headed monk, the high-cellarer, swears that the knight is either dead or hung, and that they shall have his four hundred pounds a year to spend in their abbey. The High Justice of England is in waiting as a legal officer, and avers that he will undertake to say that the knight will not come yet. Just at this moment he does arrive, meanly dressed, and looking very sad. He entreats the abbot for a little longer time for payment, but is refused. He prays the Justice for his assistance, to prevent his being wronged; but the Justice is in some complicity with the abbot, and so refuses him, on which the knight starts up, and on a round table shakes four hundred pounds out of a bag.

“The abbot sat styll, and ete no more,  
For all his ryall chere;  
He cast his hede on his sholder,  
And fast began to stare.”

Then the knight went out of the abbey; and in the gateway probably he put on his good clothes, and left his old ones there. He was very merry on his return home, to Uttersdale. At the gate, in the evening, his lady met him, and asked him if his goods were all lost.

“Be mery, dame, sayd the knyght,  
And praye for Robyn Hode,

“That ever his soule be in blysse,  
He holpe me out of my tene;  
Ne had not be his kyndenesse,  
Beggars had we ben.”

In the third fyte is told, with many humorous details of the management of Little John, how there was brought into Robin Hood's power his great enemy, the Viscount of Nottingham, or, as the Saxons called him, the High Sheriff. He was soon set down to supper, and Robin bids him be cheerful, because his life will be spared for the sake of Little John. He orders the sheriff to be divested of his hose, shoes, kirtle, and coat, and to be wrapped in a green mantle. And then all night he has to lie under the trees, — that proud sheriff. His sides smart; and no wonder, although it is in the greenwood. Robin bids his guest be glad, because this is their order of life in the forest. The sheriff replies, that it is a harder order than any friar's or anchorite's. But Robin tells the proud sheriff that he must learn to be an outlaw, as he will have to stay with his host in the woods twelve months. The sheriff is much frightened at this announcement, asks to have his head cut off, and says even that he will forgive his executioner. He proposes also that he should be released, and promises that he will be the best friend that Robin ever had. And ultimately he takes an oath that he will never lie in wait for Robin; and that if ever he finds any of his men, he will help them all he can.

“ Now have the sheryf sworne his othe,  
And home he began to gone;  
He was as full of grene wode  
As ever was hepe of stone.”

In the fourth fyte, Robin Hood is expecting the knight to come and repay the loan of twelve months ago; and at the Sayles, near Barnsdale, Little John with two others is on the outlook for him. A large company comes in sight. It proves to be a monk with seven sumpter horses and a great escort. The men of the escort are soon put to flight; and the monk is carried to Robin Hood. Robin puts his hood down, but his prisoner is not so courteous. However, very soon the monk is made to wash and wipe himself, and to sit down to dinner. And now the monk is asked who he is, and where he belongs.



“faynt Mary abbay, sayd the monke,  
Though I be symple here.  
In what offyce? sayd Robyn.  
Syr, the hye selerer.”

It was for love of the Virgin and with faith in her that Robin had loaned the money to the knight; and now he professes to believe that he is about to be repaid by the monk, as her messenger. The monk avers that he has no more money than twenty marks. Robin answers, that if it is so, he will not take even a penny from him, and that if he has need of more, he will lend him money; but that if there be found in his possession more than the twenty marks, then he will have to forego it. Eight hundred pounds are found in his box; which, indeed, he was carrying with him to London, to a great court which was about to be held there, and at which he hoped to be able to get under foot the knight who had been his abbot's debtor. Hardly was the monk gone when the knight appeared, bringing four hundred pounds for the repayment of the loan, twenty marks as an acknowledgment to Robin Hood, and also, as a present to Little John, a hundred bows, and a hundred sheaves of arrows, of which every one was an ell long, feathered with peacock feathers, and notched with silver. But Robin says that the Virgin Mary had been accepted by him as security for the repayment of the loan, at the time when he made it; and that now, indeed, the four hundred pounds had been repaid to him twice over, and not without the concurrence of Our Lady, through one of her officers, whom she had made her messenger from York. The bows and arrows are accepted; but in return for them Robin orders Little John to give the knight the four hundred pounds which he reckons that he was overpaid by the high-cellarer of St. Mary's. He wishes the knight to provide himself with horses and good harness, and also to have his spurs gilt anew. And if ever he should need money again, Robin invites the knight to apply to him; but he advises him never to make himself so bare again.

In the fifth fyttre, it is told that Robin Hood and his men were living quietly, when the sheriff of Nottingham proclaimed “a full fayre play,” at which all the best archers of the

North were invited to contend for a prize,—an arrow, of which the shaft was white silver, and the head and feathers rich red gold. Robin hears of this shooting-match, and tells his men that he will attend it, and will test the faith of the sheriff. At Nottingham stands the proud sheriff by the butts. The prize of the arrow is adjudged to Robin Hood, who receives it very courteously. But when he turns round towards the woods, there is an outcry against him; great horns are blown, and an ambush is disclosed. Then ensues a close fight. Little John is wounded in the knee, and begs his master to kill him outright, and so prevent his falling into the hands of the sheriff. However, he is taken up on the shoulders of Much. At last, fighting and retreating, they reach a castle, double ditched and walled.

“And there dwelled that gentyll knyght,  
Syr Rychard at the Lee,  
That Robyn had lent his good,  
Under the grene wode tree.”

The knight receives Robin and his men into the castle, defies the sheriff, and says that he will answer to the king for the matter, whereupon the sheriff withdraws and goes to London.

“I woll be at Notyngham, sayd the kynge,  
Within this fourtynyght,  
And take I wyll Robyn Hode,  
And so I wyll that knyght.”

Robin Hood returned to the forest. One day, as he was hawking, the knight was captured by the sheriff. Immediately his lady resorts to Robin Hood, and entreats him to save her husband, now in danger of life for love of him. Robin runs with his men, faster than he has before for seven years, straight into Nottingham. He meets the sheriff, and kills him in the street.

“Lye thou there, thou proud sheryf;  
Evyll mote thou thryve;  
There myght no man to the trust,  
The whyles thou were alyve.”

After the death of the sheriff and the rout of his men,

Robin proceeds to release the knight, and tells him that he must learn to run, and must accompany him, without any talk, through mire and fen, into the greenwood, and there wait till they can get grace from King Edward.

In the seventh and eighth fyttes it is told how the king came to Nottingham, and how during six months he could not get either sight or sound of Robin Hood. At last, on the advice of a forester, the king disguises himself and five attendants as monks. They then go into the woods, and soon find themselves in the presence of Robin Hood. Speedily the king has a good dinner, and not a little amusement. In a little while, he is recognized in his monkish habit, and is duly revered. He invites Robin Hood and his young men into his service at the court. Robin Hood assents to the king's proposal, perhaps with some view to the good of the fugitive knight. The king and his followers dress themselves in green, and return to Nottingham with Robin Hood and his men, in great glee. The knight was pardoned, and reinstated in his castle and lands. Robin maintained his connection with the court fifteen months. With his generosity to every one he found himself growing poor; and by the desertion of his men he was becoming lonely. One day he saw some young men shooting skilfully; and then he was reminded of his former self.

“Somtyme I was an archere good,  
A styffe and eke a stronge,  
I was commytted the best archere  
That was in mery Englonde.

“Alas! then sayd good Robyn,  
Alas and well a woo!  
Yf I dwelle longer with the kynge,  
Sorowe wyll me sloo.

“Forth than went Robyn Hode  
Tyll he came to our kynge:  
‘My lorde the kynge of Englonde,  
Graunte me myn askynge.

“ ‘ I made a chapell in Bernysdale,  
That semely is to se,  
It is of Mary Magdalene,  
And thereto wolde I be.

“ ‘ I myght never in this seven nyght  
No time to slepe ne wynke,  
Nother all these seven dayes,  
Nother ete ne drynke.

“ ‘ Me lengeth sore to Bernysdale,  
I may not be therfro,  
Barefote and wolwarde I have hyght  
Thyder for to go.’ ”

He obtains leave of absence from the king, and

“ When he came to grene wode  
In a mery mornyng,  
There he herde the-notes small  
Of byrdes mery syngyng.

“ It is ferre gone, sayd Robyn,  
That I was last here,  
Me lyst a lytell for to shote  
At the donne dere.”

Soon he was surrounded by seven score of young men; and, notwithstanding the fear of the king, he would not again return to the court. Twenty years more he lived in the woods. At the end of this time, needing to be bled, he went to Kirkesley Convent, the prioress of which was his relative. But she sacrificed her kinsman to her paramour, Sir Roger of Doncaster.

“ And there they betrayed good Robyn Hode,  
Through theyr false playe.

“ Cryst have mercy on his soule,  
That dyed on the rode!  
For he was a good outlawe,  
And dyde pore men moch gode.”

Thus ends "The Lyttell Gest." The other poems on Robin Hood are ancient, nearly all of them, yet not all of them equally so. Some of them have probably been altered in language from their originals, and perhaps also in sentiment and incidents. The one entitled "A Tale of Robin Hood" undoubtedly is ancient. And there is a copy of it now in existence, which is probably of the age of Robin Hood himself, and certainly is very closely connected with that time. It begins in a way which shows what a feeling there was for the country, in their poet at least, if not in the outlaws themselves.

"In somer when the shawes be sheyne,  
And leves be large and longe,  
Hit is fulle mery in feyre foreste  
To here the foulys song.

"To se the dere draw to the dale,  
And leve the hilles hee,  
And shadow hem in the leves grene,  
Under the grene wode tre."

It is a May morning, and also it is Whitsuntide.

"This is a mery mornynge, said litulle Johne,  
Be hym that dyed on tre,  
A more mery man than I am one  
Lyves not in cristiantè."

But though reminded of the joyful season, and the fine morning, and urged to pluck up heart, —

"Ze on thyngre greves me, seid Robyne,  
And does my hert myche woo,  
That I may not so solem day  
To mas nor matyns goo.

"Hit is a fourtnet and more, seyd hee,  
Syn I my sauour see."

Robin determines to adventure himself in Nottingham; and Little John accompanies him on the road. But as they walk along together, they quarrel; and Little John leaves his

master, as he says, for ever. While Robin Hood is kneeling at mass in St. Mary's church, there stands beside him a great-headed monk, who suddenly rushes out of the church, has every gate in Nottingham fastened, and then alarms the sheriff. Robin is attacked, has his sword broken in his hand, and is captured. Little John is the friend to rescue him, with much ingenuity, some fighting, and some humorous tricks, in one of which the king himself is involved.

In a ballad entitled "Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne," on account of some quarrel, Little John is said to have left his master; and he very soon fell into the power of the sheriff. But, as it happened, on that very day Guy of Gisborne was searching for Robin Hood, with a view probably to some reward as his captor. He encounters Robin, but is himself slain. Robin dresses himself in the clothes of his enemy, and disguises the body of Guy with his own gown of green. The sheriff promises any reward that can be asked to the conqueror of Robin Hood. But Robin asks only that he may be allowed to be the executioner of Little John. Soon he has admission to him; and having loosed him, hand and foot, he gave him Guy's bow.

"Then John he took Guyes bow in his hand,  
His boltes and arrowes eche one :  
When the sheriffe saw Little John bend his bow,  
He fettled him to be gone.

"Towards his house in Nottingham towne,  
He fled full fast away,  
And soe did all the companye :  
Not one behind wold stay."

In other ballads are narrated other adventures of Robin Hood, with the Jolly Pinder of Wakefield; with a Bishop; with a Tinker, by whom he was beaten; with a Shepherd, by whom also he was worsted; with the Curtal Friar of Fountain's Abbey; with Queen Catherine; with Four Beggars; with the Bishop of Hereford; with a Butcher; with a Knight; with a Ranger; and with King Edward. There are also accounts of his rescuing three squires, who were about to be

hung for deer-stealing, and also the three sons of a widow, and of his setting Will Stutley free, even at the gallows, surrounded by the sheriff and his men.

In "Robin Hood's Death and Burial" is told the manner of his end more fully than in "The Little Gest." Robin was ill in the neighborhood of Kirklees; and speaking with Little John, he said:—

“ But I am not able to shoot one shot more,  
My arrows will not flee ;  
But I have a cousin lives down below,  
Please God, she will bleed me.”

On his coming to the convent door, his cousin is the first to meet him.

“ ‘ Will you please to sit down, cousin Robin,’ she said,  
‘ And drink some beer with me ? ’  
‘ No, I will neither eat nor drink,  
Till I am blooded by thee.’

“ ‘ Well, I have a room, cousin Robin,’ she said,  
‘ Which you did never see ;  
And if you please to walk therein,  
You blooded by me shall be.’

“ She took him by the lily-white hand,  
And let him to a private room,  
And there she blooded bold Robin Hood,  
Whilst one drop of blood would run.

“ She blooded him in the vein of the arm,  
And lock'd him up in the room ;  
There did he bleed all the live-long day,  
Until the next day at noon.”

At last he bethinks him of a casement door, and he blows at it three weak blasts on his bugle. Little John hears him, and breaks his way through two or three doors to his master, of whom he begs that he may be allowed to burn Kirkley Hall with the nunnery.

“ ‘Now nay, now nay,’ quoth Robin Hood,  
‘That boon I ’ll not grant thee ;  
I never hurt woman in all my life,  
Nor man in woman’s company.

“ ‘I never hurt fair maid in all my time,  
Nor at my end shall it be ;  
But give me my bent bow in my hand,  
And a broad arrow I ’ll let flee ;  
And where this arrow is taken up,  
There shall my grave digg’d be.

“ ‘Lay me a green sod under my head,  
And another at my feet ;  
And lay my bent bow at my side,  
Which was my music sweet ;  
And make my grave of gravel and green,  
Which is most right and meet.

“ ‘Let me have length and breadth enough,  
With a green sod under my head ;  
That they may say, when I am dead,  
Here lies bold Robin Hood.’

“ These words they readily promis’d him,  
Which did bold Robin please :  
And there they buried bold Robin Hood,  
Near to the fair Kirkleys.”

Such are the ancient poems and ballads, which are still extant, concerning Robin Hood. And judging of the original by these echoes of its making, among the hills and against the castle walls of England,—estimating the person by the tone of what was written about him, he must have been a man for whom enthusiasm was far from disgraceful in the English people, the commonalty,—notwithstanding they were so often reproached by scholars with their fondness for tales of Robin Hood. Judging the barons of England by the verses written for them and their vassals, and the burghers by their ballads,—those at least which have Robin Hood for their subject,—it may be said that there was a much sounder heart, much more generosity of character, and a much purer



moral taste, in the houses of the yeomen and traders, and even of the serfs, than in the castles of the lords.

Our modern scepticism is more credulous of the non-existence of persons than even the easiest faith ever was of there being giants and wizards; and in its estimate Robin Hood has been a myth, and something less, — a reputation which began of itself. And although throughout the *Little Gest* one can feel the beating of a pulse, and hear voices as though from among leaves, and almost perceive how the archer's muscles swell as he bends his bow for fight, yet, notwithstanding all these signs, it has been doubted whether there was a living man behind. A scepticism this is of that foolish sort which does not know that there may be better proofs of a man's existence than even some momentary glimpse of him, such as history might perhaps give, and in which he might appear labelled with his name and his proper dates, and yet be seen only as a stiff, unanimated figure. In the belief of the English peasantry in Robin Hood, in the things which they believe about him, and in the tone of voice with which they speak of him, there is good proof of his having lived, just as whether we actually see the sun or not, yet we know of him, and by the laws of light are sure of his place, even though we infer it only from the rainbow, — that thing which never can be touched, — a thing merely of distance and beauty.

It is singular how inadequately Robin Hood has been estimated by writers under whose cognizance he ought to have come; for, very obviously, he never could have been the idol of the English people merely as a robber, — and their idol, their hero, he was for hundreds of years, and in a way most extraordinary and quite unaccountable on the supposition that he was merely one out of the thousands of highwaymen by whom, in the course of ten centuries, the English roads have been infested. A robber, with something of the character of Dick Turpin, is the idea of Robin Hood common with persons who disregard not only the traditions, but also the feelings, of the peasantry concerning him. And truly enough, his actions are those of a mere thief, if they are viewed apart from all historical connections. His life, however, was not an isolated, disconnected existence, but a page in the history of

England,—a page which, in order to be rightly understood, must be read in connection with at least those few preceding pages which tell of the conquest of England by the Normans, and of the depressed condition of the Saxons,—of the mal-administration of church property by foreign incumbents and lordly abbots,—of large tracts of land afforested, emptied of their inhabitants, and stocked with deer,—of yeomen suffering from baronial lawlessness, and of peasants who were slaves,—of struggles against the king by the barons, such as occurred at Runnymede and Evesham,—and of longings for liberty by the serfs, such as in the course of time found utterance from the lips and the pen of John Ball of Norwich. But the era of Robin Hood has now been long forgotten; and so has his connection with his times. Hence has arisen the singular discrepancy between the way in which he has been estimated by the peasantry and the manner in which he has been regarded by historians; by some of whom he has been accounted unworthy of notice, while by others he has been reckoned only a very lucky thief. Even those historians who have been most favorable in their mention of him have yet not done him justice, from their not knowing when it was he lived, and from their not considering what his circumstances were. Camden could only describe him as “the gentlest of thieves.” Fuller also writes of him as “rather a merry than a mischievous thief, complimenting passengers out of their purses.” And in the same manner, Major, an old Scotch chronicler, says of him: “I disapprove of the rapine of the man. But he was the most humane and the prince of all robbers.”

But it was not only in the songs of the people, that Robin Hood was commemorated, but also in their games, their festival-days, and their dramas. He was introduced into the old May games, remnants in England of the Roman worship of Flora. He was incorporated among the morris-men, in that dance which the Crusaders probably learned from the Moors. He and his companions were the frequent subjects of the parish interludes which in Catholic times were played under the auspices of the church-wardens. Always and everywhere he was remembered, when young men exercised themselves in archery

at the town-butts. In many parts of the country are places which are called by his name, — wells, rocks, hills, bays, fields, — some of them as having been resorted to by him, and others of them as having been appropriated to archery, in the practice of which the young men would often elect one of their number to impersonate Robin Hood.

As a still further evidence of a fame which was once universal, from Robin Hood many proverbs have their beginning; and they will witness of his skill with the bow perhaps long after guns have been superseded. To the great multitude in England, Fairfax is a forgotten name, and so is Marlborough. The people know not who they were, or what they were, or whether it was with the sword or the pen they were great, or whether it was in courts, in campaigns, or among books. But still the great outlaw is remembered with some correctness; and when boasters are to be rebuked, it is said: “Many men talk of Robin Hood that never shot in his bow.” And when the excessive civility of fear is to be laughed at, it is said: “*Good even, good Robin Hood.*” When large measure is given by a reckless salesman, the purchaser congratulates himself on a “Robin Hood’s pennyworth.” And when exploits are too much vaunted, they are derided as having “overshot Robin Hood.”

Plays and chap-books almost innumerable show what a popular subject Robin Hood was, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. There is an unfinished drama by Ben Jonson, with the title of “The Sad Shepherd, a Tale of Robin Hood.” In Shakespeare, there is mention of him; and so there is in Coke’s Commentaries, in Holland’s Plutarch, in Harrington’s Ariosto, in the Paston Letters, in Chaucer, and at some greater length in Albion’s England by Warner. Also in Drayton’s Polyolbion is a fine description of the career of Robin Hood and of his life in the forest; and it is said: —

“In this our spacious isle, I think there is not one,  
But he hath heard some talk of him and Little John;  
And to the end of time, the tales shall ne’er be done,  
Of Scarlock, George à Green, and Much the miller’s son,  
Of Tuck, the merry friar, which many a sermon made  
In praise of Robin Hood, his outlaws, and their trade.

An hundred valiant men had this brave Robin Hood,  
Still ready at his call, that bowmen were right good,  
All clad in Lincoln green, with caps of red and blue,  
His fellow's winded horn not one of them but knew."

In the *Memoirs of Henry VIII.*, written by a chronicler contemporary with him, it is narrated, that, soon after the coronation, the king and queen were at Westminster with all their train; that the king, with the Earls of Wiltshire and Essex and other noblemen to the number of twelve, suddenly in the morning entered the queen's chamber, dressed in short coats of Kentish Kendal, and with hoods and hose of the same, and armed each one of them with a bow and arrows, sword and buckler; and after dancing awhile they withdrew, leaving the queen and her ladies much abashed both at the strange sight and their sudden coming. Seven years later in the same chronicles we are told that the king and queen were riding on Shooter's Hill, on May morning, when they encountered a company of two hundred archers, one of whom called himself Robin Hood, and invited the king and queen to see his men shoot, and also to come into the woods and see how the outlaws lived.

"Then sayd Robyn Hood, Sir, outlawes brekefastes is venyson; and therefore you must be content with such fare as we use. Then the kyng and quene sat doune, and were served with venyson and vyne, by Robyn Hood and his men, to their great contentacion. Then the kyng departed and his company, and Robyn Hood and his men them conduicted; and as they were returnyng, there met with them two lades in a ryche chariot drawen with V. horses, and every horse had his name on his head, and on every horse sat a lady with her name written, . . . and in the chayre sat the lady May, accompanied with lady Flora, richely appareled; and they saluted the kyng with diverse goodly songes, and so brought hym to Grenewyche. At this maiying was a greate number of people to beholde, to their great solace and comfort."

Thirty years later than this, in a sermon before Edward VI., Bishop Latimer tells of his experience at some church, one morning, probably on a May-day.

"I came once myselfe to a place, riding on a journey homeward from London, and I sent word over night into the town, that I would preach there in the morning, because it was holyday, and methought it was

a holydayes worke: the churche stode in my way; and I took my horsse and my companye and went thither: I thought I should have found a great companye in the churche, and when I came there, the churche dore was faste locked. I tarried there half an houre and more; at last the keye was founde; and one of the parishe commes to me, and sayes, Syr, thys ys a busye day with us, we cannot heare you: it is Robyn Hoode's Daye. The parishe are gone abroad to gather for Robyn Hoode: I pray you, let them not. I was fayne there to geve place to Robyn Hoode. I thought my rochet should have been regarded, thoughte I were not: but it woulde not serve, it was fayne to geve place to Robyn Hoodes men."

That Latimer could tell this of himself shows the intensity of that passion, which there once was all over England, for celebrating Robin Hood. It is a great instance of the popularity of the man, and of the way in which he was kept in memory.

Whence now was this great interest in Robin Hood? Did the memoirs of his life — did those ballads — make him popular? Or rather was it not interest in him which occasioned the popularity of the ballads? It may be said confidently, that these ballads could never of themselves have become very popular, and that still less could they have raised for an outlaw enthusiasm, for many generations greater than was ever felt for any king in England, and perhaps for any saint. They were not the only songs of the people in the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries. They were only a few out of the great numbers which the gleemen sang, and probably by no means the most laughable or exciting. Evidently they are not so much themselves famous songs, as they are songs about a famous man. And they are not so much the life of a man, as they are incidents in a life otherwise well known as to its character. Let us ascertain the time when this character was well known; and then perhaps, when we have placed ourselves under the same sun with the outlaw and his men, we shall be able to discern things about them which now we cannot see.

Thierry, in his *History of the Norman Conquest*, conjectures that Robin Hood was an outlaw by birth, and the last of the Saxons who refused to recognize the Norman rule;

and he supposes him to have been an opponent of Richard Cœur-de-Lion. Mr. Spencer Hall, in his *Forester's Offering*, imagines him to have been one of the followers of Simon de Montfort, and a fugitive from the battle of Evesham. A still later author, Mr. Wright, in his *Essay on the Middle Ages*, argues that, because the legends of the peasantry are the shadows of a remote antiquity, therefore they may be confidently trusted, as enabling us with tolerable certainty to place Robin Hood among the personages of the early Teutonic people.

The first mention of Robin Hood by any author whose name is now known, is to be found in the *Vision of Pierce Plowman*, where an ignorant priest confesses that he knows more of Robin Hood than he does of the personages of his religion :—

“I cannot parfitli mi paternoster, as the preist it singeth,  
But I can rymes of Roben Hode, and Randolf erl of Chester,  
But of our lorde or our lady I lerne nothyng at all.”

These lines probably were written soon after the year 1360. The most ancient manuscript of any one of the ballads, there is good reason for believing, either is itself of about the year 1330, or else is an exact copy made from a writing of that date. Ought we not, then, to suppose that not improbably Robin Hood is of that century in which we first find him named? In the poems about him, which are of any authority on the subject, there is nothing whatever of history, language, or sentiment, which is necessarily of an earlier period than the fourteenth century. Why, then, is it not proper to conclude that it is to the fourteenth century that the earliest of these ballads belong? Apart from any further evidence on the subject, it would accordingly seem that it ought to be inferred, from the language and incidents of the poems which relate to Robin Hood, and from the earliest mention of him by any writer, that he belongs to the first half of the fourteenth century. But there exists direct evidence which can be adduced on the subject.

In the Court Rolls of the Manor of Wakefield for the year 1315, there is mention of Robertus Hood as respondent in a suit brought by Anabel Brodehegh. Also in the records of

the same court in the year 1316, there is mention made of Robertus Hood; and he is described as being of Wakefield, and as having a wife of the name of Matilda. Now Wakefield is the name of a place much associated with Robin Hood, and is near Barnsley Dale, where Robin the outlaw lived. Moreover, although, in the more important poems relating to Robin Hood, there is no mention of his wife, yet in the traditions about the outlaw, and in some of the ballads, much is made of his relation to a personage called Maid Marian; and there is one of the ballads, not however in its present form one of the oldest, which states that the original name of Maid Marian was Matilda, — a name which she changed when she accompanied Robin into the forest, on his becoming an outlaw.

Now on the supposition that Robin Hood was once an inhabitant of Wakefield, the question is, What event was there by which we can suppose that he might have become an outlaw, and yet retained for himself respect and even honor? Murder, theft, — certainly these never could have been the beginning of a career by which he was almost canonized. How was it, too, that there were as many as a hundred men or more living with him in the greenwood? Of mere outlaws, who had become so by being cried in a court of justice, there hardly could have been so many in one district. It would seem as though so many men together must have betaken themselves to the woods through some great act of outlawry, covering a wide space of country, and implicating a large number of persons. It is also to be accounted for, how these companions of Robin in his outlawry, being so numerous, should all of them have been such skilful bowmen, and persons inured apparently to something of military obedience.

Now there did happen in the year 1322 an event by which men to this number, and of this character, might have become outlaws, and also in a way by which they would have drawn to themselves great interest and regard from all the Saxon population of England. In the year 1322 occurred the insurrection of Thomas, Earl of Lancaster. Though he was of Norman origin, yet he attracted to himself much sympathy

from the Saxon population, partly for his character, and still more on account of the reasons for his rebellion. There was something Anti-Norman in his outbreak. In his cause there was some matter with which Robin Hood could sympathize. And also in the feeling on behalf of the Earl, which prevailed over the West Riding of Yorkshire, there was a strong tendency to carry a man like Robin Hood into the army of the Earl's retainers. It is possible, as Robin Hood appears to have been a landholder, that he may have followed the standard of the Earl of Lancaster, not merely from his own feeling, and the public feeling of Wakefield, but also in conformity with some feudal claim upon him. In March, 1322, was fought the battle of Boroughbridge, and with it ended the rebellion of the Earl of Lancaster. His army was routed, and he himself, with many others, was executed. It was not far from Wakefield to Boroughbridge; and it was not far from Boroughbridge to the forest of Barnsdale. Now there is good evidence that Robin was in the woods as an outlaw in the year 1324, together with a great company of archers, who owned him as their leader. Is it not, then, a probable supposition that they were living in the forest as fugitives from the battle of Boroughbridge, and that they had incurred their outlawry as rebels against Edward II.?

In the Little Gest are some statements which are corroborated in a very singular manner by papers in the possession of the English government. In that poem it is said that King Edward went to Nottingham, and that then during a space of six months he traversed all Lancashire and the surrounding region, till he came to Plumpton Park; and that finding everywhere a great scarcity of deer, —

“The kynge was wonder wroth withall,  
And swore by the trynyte,  
I wolde I had Robyn Hode,  
With eyen I might him see;

“And he that wolde smyte of the knyghtes hede,  
And brynge it to me,  
He shall have the knyghtes londes,  
Syr Rycharde at the Le.



“I gyve it hym with my charter,  
And sele it with my honde,  
To have and holde for evermore  
In all mery Englonde.”

Also in the poem, as we have already seen, it is said that the king got sight of Robin Hood, and carried him and some of his men to London, to the court, where Robin remained eighteen months; at the end of which time he took his leave, alleging the plea of ill health.

Now Edward I. never was in Lancashire, after he became king. Edward III. probably was never in Lancashire at all, certainly not during the earlier part of his reign. This visit of a King Edward to Lancashire and the neighboring districts must then have been made by Edward II. Now that king did make a progress into Lancashire, Yorkshire, and the adjoining districts; and from existing documents, it is ascertained to have been made in the year 1323. Altogether, at this time the king was eight months in the North of England, and among other places he was at York, at Pickering, at Jervaulx Abbey, at Haia Park, not far from the Plumpton mentioned in the ballads, at Blackburn, at Liverpool, where he sailed upon the Mersey, at Wharleton Castle, where he paid Eleanor Reed and Alice Wharleton four shillings for singing him songs on Simon de Montfort and other subjects, at the monastery of Dale Royal, at Sandbach, and, on the 9th day of November, at Nottingham. Now all this is a very satisfactory corroboration of the Little Gest, in the account which it contains of the king's having visited Nottingham, and inspected Lancashire and Yorkshire.

In the Little Gest, it is said that when the king returned to London, after his Northern progress was completed, he had Robin Hood and some of his men with him, in his service at the court. Now the king spent the Christmas at Kenilworth Castle, and did not return to London till the beginning of 1324. Therefore, according to the ballad, Robin Hood must have reached London, as an attendant on the king, at the beginning of the year 1324. And in an original authentic document still in existence occurs the name of Robyn Hode as having earned wages in the royal service, and been paid in April of

that year. It does not appear that there was any person of the name of Robin Hood in the service of the king before his visit to Nottingham. Thus the name of Robin appears, and it also disappears, from the Journal of the Chamber, in a manner which completely corroborates the account of Robin Hood contained in the Little Gest. The Journal of the Chamber is a record of the royal expenses, and it is still preserved in one of the public offices in London; and in the volumes for the seventeenth and eighteenth years of the reign of Edward II. occur several entries of the name of Robyn Hode, as a "vadlet, porteur de la chambre." The last time that he was paid his wages there was deducted the pay of seven days; being the exact time during which, in the ballad, he tells the king he has been unable either to eat or sleep. Also from the Journal it appears, that, two days before the monthly payment of his wages had become due, five shillings were paid him, as a gift by order, because he could no longer work. This again agrees exactly with the Little Gest, when it tells that Robin went to the king and begged that he might be allowed to go down to Barnsdale, as being in ill health.

" Yf it be so, than sayd our kynge,  
It may no better be;  
Seven nyght I gyve the leve,  
No lengre, to dwell fro me.

" Gramercy, lorde, then sayd Robyn,  
And set hym on his kne;  
He toke his leve full courteysly,  
To grene wode then went he."

And now with full confidence it may be concluded that the Robin Hood of the poems and the Robyn Hode of the court are the same person. With high probability, it may also be supposed that this same person, who was an outlaw in the woods, and afterwards an attendant at court, came into the woods as a fugitive from the battle of Boroughbridge; and also was the same person with the yeoman, Robertus Hood, whose name was called in the Manor Court at Wakefield, on two different occasions, a few years previously.

At the end of the Tale of Robin Hood, the king says that Little John loves Robin better than any of the persons at the court, which would be a very feeble remark, if Little John had never known them. No doubt he was at court with his master, as the Little Gest relates. What the name of Little John really was is not known; so that, even if it exist in any record, it would not be recognized. Probably it was not entered on the same page with Robin Hood's, because from the ballad he would appear to have held a different office from a "vadlet, porteur de la chambre." After Robin's return to the forest, he fell into the custody of the sheriff, and was likely to lose his life; but Little John released him by an artifice, in which the king was one of his victims.

"Litulle Johne has begyled us bothe,  
And that fulle wel I se,  
Or ellis the schereff of Notyngham  
Hye hongut shud he be.

"I mad hem zemen of the crowne,  
And gaf hem fee with my hond,  
I gaf hem grithe, seid oure kyng,  
Thorowout all mery Ingland.

"I gaf hem grithe, then seide oure kyng,  
I say, so mot I the,  
For sothe soche a zeman as he is on  
In all Ingland are not thre."

Little John had been made a yeoman of the crown by the king; and from this appointment we may infer the esteem in which he was held, although he had been first known to the king as an outlaw; because in the Curialia the yeomen of the crown are described as "twenty-four most seemly persons, cleanly, and strongest archers, honest of conditions and of behavior, bold men, chosen and tried."

What the real reasons were for which Robin Hood abandoned the court, — and, if he wished to retire from the court, why he did not return to Wakefield, and whether his forfeited position in his former dwelling-place was impossible to be recovered, — all these are questions to which there are no an-

swers. It is possible only to reason about his conduct from such feelings as may, or rather must, have been excited in him by the nature of his times. It is not likely that he was at all reconciled to the institutions and social practices of his age by a residence at court; — by witnessing how shamelessly the king sold justice for bribes, how ruthlessly he seized upon free laborers when he needed their services, and how lavishly the barons wasted the wealth of Saxon sinews and what had been Saxon lands; by experiencing how contemptible at court was a Saxon man, and Saxon speech, and a Saxon name; and by seeing something of the profligacy of the great churchmen, dissolute, avaricious, oppressive, — men so unchristian as to have made Roger Bacon think, a few years before, that the time of Antichrist was near.

But whatever may have been his feelings about any of the personages at the court, he abandoned it, and, clothed in woollen and on foot, travelling like a pilgrim, he returned to Barnsdale. And if we could only see England as he saw it, if we could only see the country as it was when he acted in it, then his actions in it we should be better able to estimate. On his journey from London to Barnsdale, he passed one castle after another, every one of them, like a hostile camp, the terror of the surrounding country. He passed stately abbeys, and saw things for which better speech than his own hot words would soon be found; for Wiclif was just born. He passed through forests, — great districts, in which churches and houses had been demolished, and from which every human creature had been extirpated, to make way for deer and wild-boars.

At the time of Robin Hood, nearly half of all England was in the possession of churchmen. Almost all the remainder of the land belonged to the king and the barons; and a full tenth part of the country was afforested, — the owners and occupants having been expelled, without any compensation, merely that the king might have room in which to solace himself, when wearied by his royal duties. For the maintenance of these forests there were laws of the most inhuman character, enforced by rangers, foresters, and verderers, in a manner almost more tyrannical than the laws themselves. Of

the inhabitants of the country, the larger part were in a state of slavery more or less complete, and a great proportion of them were serfs, — persons for whom there was no law but the will of their owners, — men so far off from the possession of rights, that even in Magna Charta there had been no mention of them except as aggrandizing their owners. And even the yeomen were subject to such oppressions from their feudal superiors, as made necessary a law by which persons were even forbidden to forfeit or quit their holdings of land.

Also in Robin Hood's age the distinction between Norman and Saxon was very great. The Normans were contemptuous and oppressive, and treated the Saxons, and especially their serfs, in a manner which astonished Froissart, from its being so much worse than any conduct which he had ever witnessed on the Continent. And the Saxons hated the Normans, some of them as inhuman masters, and others as robbers in possession of land which ought to have been their own patrimony. These hostilities and grievances must have been immensely aggravated by the circumstance that the sufferers spoke one language and the tyrants another. The laws were in the French language, and in the courts of justice the proceedings were in French. All orders from the castle for execution among the adjacent cottages and farm-houses were in French. The cruelty of the laws, the oppressiveness of hard usages, the caprice and insolence of greatness, were in French; and to it all the sufferer could only bend himself and be dumb, or else utter himself in a language, the unintelligible sounds of which would sink him before his persecutor lower still than the lowliness of a serf.

A king who was a tyrant, and all the more intolerable from his sitting on the throne of the Saxon Alfred, prelates grown to be lords in the name of the lowly Jesus, houses that were called God's built and decorated by the toil of serfs, wealth that had been given to the Church and the poor perverted by churchmen to their ambitious projects, forests and forest laws, barons with their privileges and powers so terrible, so horrible, — ah! about these men and things Robin Hood, on his journey from London to Barnsdale, may well have had thoughts to disquiet him, and through which he could never again be content to become a member of society.

And so into the woods went Robin Hood again, intending to become their permanent denizen. A robber was he? So he was, — a man who robbed robbers. An outlaw was he? So he was; but it was chiefly by being outside of the king's law, for all the laws of charity and courtesy he kept. And was he probably excommunicate? So he was, by bishops and archbishops; and yet also he was very religious, feeling God in the woods, and seeking him sometimes in churches at his deadly peril.

Robin Hood, in his age, was a great reformer, — or rather, perhaps, a great opponent of abuses. In religion he may be regarded as having been a forerunner of Wiclif; though it was in such a manner as was natural to a person who could not write, but who was the best archer of his day. As to the oppression of the poor Saxons by their Norman lords, the iniquitous confiscation by the king of broad lands for his mere pleasure, the wrongs of women in an age of universal violence, — as regards all these things he was a reformer in his way. And his way was very practical. He did not declaim against the Pope for what was wrong in England, nor concentrate all his efforts on a man in Rome for grievances in Nottinghamshire or Yorkshire. Nor did he think that nothing could be accomplished for himself and his friends in the West Riding unless through the king, — a man hard to approach, and, when reached, perhaps hardly worth persuading. Nor yet, knowing how full of oppressors England was, did he think that resistance to them was quite useless. But he argued with himself very differently from this, and, being a man neither of speech nor pen, he uttered himself by his life. If the restoration of land to its just owners and right uses were a hopeless attempt, then he himself would go into the forest, and, in such a way as he could, he would live on the land, some of which perhaps ought to have been his own inheritance. And as for the Church and the social state of England, — these he would correct about Barnsdale; and if not the Church, then a few things ecclesiastical and a few churchmen, even though only for a few minutes; and if not laws and usages, then a few cases of ill-usage and a few instances of legal injustice. And so he maintained himself

and his friends on the king's deer. And if churchmen came his way, rich with funds belonging to the poor, then he constituted himself their almoner. If, under the rule of Norman chivalry, everywhere women were wronged, then he himself, though a Saxon, would treat them with that deference which should be an example over all England. And if unjust institutions were higher than his reach, then at least he would succor the oppressed and intimidate the oppressors in the neighborhood of Barnsley.

Robin Hood was very much of an Englishman; or perhaps it might be said that in him there was much on which the English character was modelled. For he must have had great influence on the people of England, celebrated as he was by them for several hundred years so passionately, — the yeoman who was independent of king and sheriff by his strong and quick wit, — the archer who, year after year, turned the oppressor into a jest, — the man who could both reverence law and resist it, — the denizen of the woods whose life was poetry.

Even apart from any interest in Robin Hood himself, the poems on the outlaw are worthy of attention. If in the British firmament Chaucer be the morning star of poetry, as he has been called, then in these ballads we have something of the gray dawn. They are important as having been once a large part of the literature of the people, and the most popular of all writings. They are songs to some of which probably Chaucer listened, while they were yet quite fresh, and he himself a schoolboy in London. They are of that period when the language of England was ceasing to be Anglo-Norman, and was becoming what now is called English. And it was mainly in the composition and use of these ballads that the idioms and words of the fourteenth century were tried. In the earlier part of that century the French of the Norman invasion was still spoken by the barons in their castles and at court; while in monastic cells, in churches, and by the clergy and among scholars, Latin was the spoken language. As yet English was only just forming, and, through the means of gleemen and minstrels, was shaping its idioms and words to meet the apprehension of laborers at their ales,

of old men sitting under trees on the village green, and of crowds assembled at fairs and wakes. In singing of Robin Hood the English language was preparing to be that tongue with which Chaucer so easily made men weep, and so readily made them laugh,—that utterance by which Shakespeare rendered kings and peasants, scholars, soldiers, and women, intelligible to one another and to all time,—that speech which afterwards was to sound from Milton's lips, as "musical as is Apollo's lute."

In the study of history it is curious and instructive to remark, in regard to the growth of national character, that very much more is concerned with it than is supplied by the laws or obedience to them; that it is fed apparently from some inner, pervading spirit, and especially that it is strengthened by sympathy with eminent persons, the heroes of their age. Integrity and manliness are characteristics of the middle classes of England, not through any nurturing by the law, nor exclusively through implicit obedience to the government, but even, to some great extent, through law-breaking, and through their reverence for such men as Milton, Sidney, and Hampden. As to the serfs of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and the peasantry of the sixteenth, what majesty was there in the law for them to reverence? What justice was there by conforming to which they might themselves grow more just? And what righteousness was there in their law-makers, or in the way in which laws were made, that they could ever feel that parliamentary legislation was to be listened to like the voice of virtue? Enactments have power to repress, but even the best of them, merely as statutes, are almost powerless to foster; they can bow the mind to slavery, but they never can lift it up to freedom. In the fourteenth century, when a serf was an object of sale, as the law said, "with all his consequences," and when by law a man was hanged for feeding his hungry family on the deer which ran wild over a large part of the country, and even over the fields which his ancestors had ploughed,—which would have been the more hopeful as a prognostic to be noticed in the peasantry, a ready obedience to the statutes of their tyrants, or their glory in Robin Hood?

A simple yeoman armed with a bow, and leading the life



of an outlaw, yet how much he has been to the English nation, and in so many ways!—indeed, in all the ways by which men are strengthened in courage, in heart, and by the imagination. He has been more to the people of England than many a statesman of great fame, than many a general entombed in Westminster Abbey, and than many a poet whose name rises gratefully to the lips. By having been taken into the heart of the people, how has he been immortalized! And how much already has his fame outlasted! Sherwood is not what it was; Barnsdale is a forest no longer; of Kirklees nunnery there is nothing now to be seen but the old gate-house; and of St. Mary's Abbey, on the banks of the Ouse, there now remain only a few arches, over the tops of which elm-trees stretch their long arms. But to the English mind Robin Hood is still almost as real a personage as he was when the first Edwards were kings. He has survived many an evil institution of his day,—serfdom, and many a Norman usage,—much that was Vandal, tyrannical, beastly, in feudalism,—and much of the low estimate in which once everything but rank was held. His spirit, though working unperceived, will yet help to correct many a miserable result of baronial privilege in England. And he himself will be a name and a power in that future, however remote it may still be, when aristocracy shall be of nature, and not of Normanism,—of character, and not simply of station,—of man as God distinguishes him, and not of man merely as the monarch labels him viscount, earl, or duke.

Robin Hood will last with the English language, and will be a living name as long as the heart shall thrill at heroism, or May morning be fragrant with flowers, or the yew-tree be remembered for what it was in the times of archery, and as long as those shall be looked back upon with gratitude by whom liberty was vindicated in slavish days.

And now is it asked, Who wrote these poems? This inquiry cannot be answered; for there is nothing whatever to be recorded on the subject. But from the character of the ballads themselves, it may be said confidently that the Lytell Geste, and some others, must have been the productions of a person well acquainted with the region between Notting-

ham and Wakefield, and familiar with country life. Also this same person, who lived between Nottingham and Wakefield, must have been a contemporary with Robin Hood, and must indeed have been even a neighbor of his; for in the portrait of the outlawed yeoman which is given in the ballads, there are many traits which must have been painted from life. A contemporary with Robin Hood, a neighbor, a poet! Dimly through the past is discernible the figure of such a man, living at the entrance of Barnsdale, not far from the monastery of Hampole, and perhaps connected with it. His name is Richard Rolle. In his day he was a popular versifier. And he may very well have been the author of the Robin Hood ballads, although to us he is known in connection exclusively with poems of a religious character. But whoever the man was with whom these ballads on Robin Hood originated, happy was he in his subject. A nameless person and not reckoned among authors, yet he is one of the greatest for the influence which he has had. The *Lytell Geste of Robin Hood*, — the delight of the peasantry when they were serfs, the glory of the yeomen whilst struggling against feudal wickedness, sung age after age with enthusiasm for three hundred years and more, and even now, after five hundred years, quite popular in the Yorkshire cottages, — perhaps a poem cannot be named to equal it for the power which it must have exercised on the character of the English people. For influence it is equalled not by the *Canterbury Tales*, though Chaucer be the mimic to make us laugh and weep; nor by the dramas of Shakespeare, from the knowledge of which the larger half of the people have always been excluded by their inability to read; nor by the *Faerie Queene*, an allegory which courtiers were the first to peruse, and which almost only students can understand; nor yet by *Paradise Lost*, the solemn joy chiefly of Puritans and of scholars.

Of these poems the yew-tree is the emblem, aged, gnarled, and strong, — once the yeoman's armory. And through the branches of this yew-tree always will men hear the huntsman's horn, and smell the cool, sweet air of May mornings, and see glittering in the dew the splendor of suns which have long since set, and descry walking in forests which have long

ago fallen the form of Robin Hood, the outlawed yeoman, the ballad-hero, the friend of the poor and weak, and the joyous, triumphant enemy of oppressors.

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ART. II. — *Lectures read to the Seniors in Harvard College.*

By EDWARD T. CHANNING. With a Biographical Notice by R. H. DANA, JR. Boston : Ticknor and Fields. 1856.

THE office of the Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory in Harvard University is undoubtedly one of the most important in that institution. It was remarked with truth by an ancient writer, that the proper use of language is a leading test of intellectual culture. Clearness of thought and purity of taste are chiefly manifested through the medium of words, and can hardly exist without the aid of words. Among the ancient Greeks the rhetorical teachers to a considerable extent identified themselves with the Sophists, who corrupted the youth of the Hellenic republic, while they amassed great private fortunes by teaching the art of making the worse appear the better cause, for the purpose of gaining selfish political ends with the popular bodies. To the best thinkers and wisest men of Athens, — to Socrates and Plato, — this art appeared to be, as indeed it was, a pernicious system of mental trickery, which struck at the fundamental distinctions between truth and falsehood, right and wrong, virtue and vice. The dialogues of Plato, and especially the noblest of them all, the *Gorgias*, contain the most masterly exposures of the mischiefs done by this immoral art, and some of the most pungent passages in the Aristophanic comedy have the same general bearing.

In modern times, no doubt, there reigns among controversialists much of the same unconscientious dealing with truth, the same system of disguises, by which the real features of a question in dispute are attempted to be hidden under the veil of deceptive words and phrases ; but the art of rhetoric, treated by systematic writers, and taught in the schools and colleges,